

# Art for The Masses 1911-1917

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*A Radical Magazine and Its Graphics*

Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris

July 19–October 3, 1985

# *The* MASSES



Drawn by John Sloan

The Unemployed

# Art for The Masses 1911–1917

## *A Radical Magazine and Its Graphics*

*The Masses*, published in Greenwich Village between 1911 and 1917, brought together a talented group of artists, intellectuals, and activists in an atmosphere of creative impertinence and political concern. The magazine not only examined the social issues of its extraordinary era, but made a lasting contribution to the history of American graphics by publishing some of the best and most characteristic drawings by the urban realists now known as the Ashcan School.

*The Masses* began as an earnest propagandist journal, founded by the Dutch socialist Piet Vlag in order to promote consumer cooperatives and the ideals of Christian Socialism. From its inception it included literature and full-page illustrations in an exhortatory academic style. After the magazine was reorganized in 1912 under the editorship of Max Eastman and a collective board (including John Sloan as art editor, the radical journalist John Reed, and the literary critic Floyd Dell), its editorial policy changed. *The Masses* now combined “free expression” with “the livelier forms of propaganda” in a wide-ranging attack on all “old systems.” The magazine’s courageous stands earned it respect and a loyal following but also brought sanctions from official censors.

Humor and high-quality art played important roles in *The Masses*’ program. In the minds of the editors, art, satire, and revolutionary politics all formed part of the same fight against bourgeois convention and could be made to “appeal to the masses” without talking down to them. Though the entire staff worked without pay, the magazine’s political stance—and the opportunity to publish drawings free from the restraints of the conservative art establishment and the commercial press—attracted contributions from some of the era’s leading graphic artists and cartoonists. Not every drawing made a political statement. On the staff were a group of realists—including Sloan, George Bellows, Glenn O. Coleman, and the

young Stuart Davis—who depicted life on the streets of New York in sketchy crayon drawings that combined caricature with direct observation. Sloan experimented with a number of printing techniques before devising a method to reproduce the rough texture of a crayon line on a metal relief plate, without the need for halftone. Merging medium and message, *The Masses* presented a style of drawing that influenced a generation of socially concerned artists.

In true socialist fashion, the staff hoped to run the publication as a cooperative effort rather than have it controlled by one editor. Although the editors rejected the avant-garde art introduced at the Armory Show in 1913, they never resolved the question of whom the magazine’s drawings were supposed to reach, and how. In 1916 Davis, Sloan, and Coleman led an “artists’ strike” to protest the increasing pressure to give their art a specific political message and eventually resigned from the staff. Illustrations published after 1916 included much stronger cartoons criticizing American involvement in World War I, but also more “pure,” non-topical art, including figure studies by Maurice Sterne, John Storrs, and Arthur B. Davies.

In its heyday, *The Masses* reached a circulation of about 25,000. It ceased publication in 1917 when the United States Post Office revoked its mailing license—one of the first applications of the Espionage Act to suppress a left-wing journal. Eastman revived the publication as the *Liberator* (1918–24), and many of its artists and writers contributed to the more doctrinaire *New Masses* in the 1920s and 1930s. But the dynamic blend of style and subject, humor, art, and politics that characterized the best of the early publication has never been rivaled.

REBECCA ZURIER  
*Guest Curator*

# Checklist

*Dimensions are in inches; height precedes width.*

## John Barber (1893–1965)

Study for “*Yours for the Revolution*,” c. 1915  
Ink on paper, 6 x 7¾  
Published in *The Masses*, January 1915, p. 11  
Collection of Dr. Margaret D. Barber,  
courtesy of the University of Virginia Art  
Museum, Charlottesville

*Trying to Recover from Civilization*, c. 1916  
Ink and pencil on paper, 7¾ x 9⅝  
Published in *The Masses*, June 1916, p. 15  
Collection of Dr. Margaret D. Barber,  
courtesy of the University of Virginia Art  
Museum, Charlottesville

## Cornelia Barns (1888–1941)

*Side Show Tickets*, c. 1913  
Ink and wash on board, 25½ x 17  
Not published  
Philadelphia Museum of Art; Gift of  
Mr. and Mrs. John Sloan

*Trying on Hats*, c. 1913  
Ink, pencil, and wash on paper, 10 x 6¾  
Not published  
Philadelphia Museum of Art; Gift of  
Mr. and Mrs. John Sloan

## Maurice Becker (1889–1975)

*Untitled*, 1916  
Crayon, ink, and opaque white on paper,  
14 x 14  
Published in *The Masses*, December 1916,  
p. 4  
Collection of the Willner family

## George Bellows (1882–1925)

“*Superior Brains*”: *The Business Men’s  
Class*, 1913  
Transfer lithograph, reworked with crayon  
and ink, 16 x 25¼  
Published in *The Masses*, April 1913,  
pp. 10–11  
Boston Public Library; Albert H. Wiggin  
Collection

*Why Don’t They Go to the Country for a  
Vacation?*, 1913  
Transfer lithograph, reworked with pen,  
25 x 22½  
Published in *The Masses*, August 1913, p. 4  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Los  
Angeles County Fund

*Benediction in Georgia*, 1916  
Lithograph, 16 x 20  
Published in *The Masses*, May 1917,  
pp. 22–23  
Boston Public Library; Albert H. Wiggin  
Collection

## Kenneth Russell Chamberlain (1891–1984)

*Count Berchtold*: “*Take Good Care of Our  
Little Bird, Gentlemen, While I Step Out  
and Blow Up the Whole Slavic Race*”  
(published as “*You Will Pardon Me,  
Messieurs, If I Postpone This Congress a  
Moment While I Step Out and Abolish the  
Slavic Race*”), 1914  
Crayon, ink, and opaque white on paper,  
22⅞ x 17  
Published in *The Masses*, September 1914,  
p. 4  
Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts,  
University of California at Los Angeles;  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Russell  
Chamberlain

## Glenn O. Coleman (1887–1932)

*Coffee Time on a Cold Day*, c. 1909  
Charcoal and pencil on paper, 10⅓¼ x 11¼  
Not published  
The Grey Art Gallery and Study Center,  
New York University Art Collection; Gift  
of Arthur G. Altschul

## Stuart Davis (1894–1964)

*At the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 1913  
Ink, crayon, and wash on paper, 14½ x 10½  
Published in *The Masses*, March 1913, p. 15  
Collection of Earl Davis

“*Gee, Mag, Think of Us Bein’ on a Magazine  
Cover!*,” 1913  
Crayon and ink on paper, 16 x 20  
Published in *The Masses*, June 1913, cover  
Collection of Earl Davis

*Jackson’s Band* (published as “*Life’s Done  
Been Gettin’ Monotonous Since Dey  
Bu’ned Down Ou’ Ah Church*”), 1913  
Ink and crayon on paper, 24¾ x 21¼  
Published in *The Masses*, February 1914,  
p. 20  
Collection of Earl Davis

*Jersey City Portrait*, 1915  
Crayon on paper, 26 x 21½  
Published in *The Masses*, July 1915, p. 10  
Collection of Earl Davis

Postcard to John Sloan, 1920  
Ink and watercolor on paper, 5½ x 3¼  
Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington; John  
Sloan Collection

## Al Frueh (1880–1968)

*Untitled (Sheet of Studies)*, 1914  
Pencil and ink on paper, 13 x 10  
Published in *The Masses*, October 1917, p. 34  
Collection of the estate of Al Frueh



**Henry Glintenkamp (1887–1946)**

*"Girls Wanted,"* c. 1916

Crayon on paper, 26 x 19½

Published in *The Masses*, February 1916,  
p. 9

Collection of Ben and Beatrice Goldstein

*Physically Fit* (published without title),  
1917

Crayon and ink on board, 20½ x 16½

Published in *The Masses*, October 1917,  
p. 9

Collection of the Willner family

**Robert Minor (1884–1952)**

*Pittsburgh*, 1916

Crayon and ink on paper, 20 x 26½

Published in *The Masses*, August 1916, p. 21

Collection of Ben and Beatrice Goldstein

**Boardman Robinson (1876–1952)**

*Europe*, 1916, 1916

Crayon, ink, and opaque white on paper,  
18 x 24

Published in *The Masses*, October 1916,  
pp. 18–19

Collection of Ben and Beatrice Goldstein

**John Sloan (1871–1951)**

*"Political Action,"* 1912

Crayon, ink, white chalk, and opaque white  
on board, 18¾ x 14

Published in *The Masses*, January 1913, p. 4  
Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington; Gift of  
Helen Farr Sloan

*At the Top of the Swing*, 1913

Chalk and ink on board, 15¾ x 13½

Published in *The Masses*, May 1913, cover  
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven;  
Gift of Dr. Charles E. Farr

*Before Her Makers and Her Judge*, 1913

Crayon on paper, 16½ x 25

Published in *The Masses*, August 1913,  
pp. 10–11

Whitney Museum of American Art, New  
York; Purchase 36.38

*The Curse*, 1913

Crayon on paper, 13½ x 4½

Published in *The Masses*, February 1913,  
p. 12

Collection of Richard P. W. Williams

Study for *The Return from Toil*, 1913

Ink on paper, 6½ x 4

Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington; Gift of  
Helen Farr Sloan

*The Unemployed*, 1913

Printer's proof, 14 x 11

Published in *The Masses*, March 13, cover  
Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington; John  
Sloan Collection

*The Orango-Tango*, c. 1914

Crayon on paper, 17½ x 14

Published in *The Masses*, February 1914,  
p. 4

Collection of Mrs. Edwin Herzog

*Bachelor Girl*, 1915

Crayon, wash, and watercolor on paper,  
13½ x 13

Published in *The Masses*, February 1915,  
p. 7

The Art Institute of Chicago; The Olivia  
Shaler Swan Memorial Collection

**Maurice Sterne (1878–1957)**

*Untitled*, 1917

Crayon and wash on paper, 17½ x 24

Published in *The Masses*, April 1917, p. 25  
Martin Diamond Fine Arts, Inc., New York

**John Storrs (1885–1956)**

*Untitled (Crouching Figure)*, 1914

Etching, 5⅛ x 5⅛

Published in *The Masses*, October 1917, p. 21  
Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, Ltd., New York

*Untitled (Reclining Nude)*, 1915

Etching, 3⅞ x 7¼

Published in *The Masses*, October 1917, p. 20  
Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, Ltd., New York

**Art Young (1866–1943)**

*Nearer, My God, to Thee*, 1913

Ink on board, 19 x 12½

Published in *The Masses*, December 1913,  
p. 17

Argosy Bookstore, New York

*Untitled (Church of the Holy Name . . .)*,  
1913

Ink on paper, 14⅝ x 25⅞

Published in *The Masses*, December 1913,  
pp. 6–7

Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington; Gift of  
Helen Farr Sloan

*Having Their Fling*, 1917

Crayon and wash on board, 18 x 15

Published in *The Masses*, September 1917,  
p. 7

Argosy Bookstore, New York

*A New Reading of an Old Parable*, 1917

Ink on board, 8½ x 11

Published in *The Masses*, January 1917,  
p. 11

Argosy Bookstore, New York

The exhibition includes memorabilia and a  
representative selection of original copies of  
*The Masses* and related magazines.

This exhibition was organized by the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.

#### Exhibition Itinerary

Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, University of California at Los Angeles (April 21–May 26, 1985) ; Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris (July 18–October 3, 1985) ; Boston University Art Gallery (November 1–December 8, 1985) ; Yale University Art Gallery (January 8–March 9, 1986). Grants for the exhibition and its catalogue were provided through the generosity of Inncorp Resorts and Conference Centers, The DeWitt Wallace and Lila Acheson Wallace Funds, and the Swann Foundation for Caricature and Cartoon.

#### Catalogue

*Art for The Masses*, by Rebecca Zurier with contributions by Earl Davis and Elise K. Kenney. Published by the Yale University Art Gallery.

Whitney Museum of American Art  
at Philip Morris  
120 Park Avenue  
New York, New York 10017

#### Gallery Hours

Monday–Saturday 11:00 am–6:00 pm  
Thursday until 7:30 pm

#### Sculpture Court Hours

Monday–Saturday 7:30 am–9:30 pm  
Sunday 11:00 am–7:00 pm  
Free admission

#### Gallery Talks

Monday, Wednesday, Friday at 12:30 pm  
Tours by appointment  
For information call (212) 878-2550

#### *Design*

Elizabeth Finger

#### *Typesetting*

Haber Typographers Inc.

#### *Printing*

Eastern Press, Inc.

Funding for the Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris is provided by Philip Morris Incorporated.

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